

Message Text

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R 081558Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY LISBON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1722
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 LISBON 4534

FOR EMBASSY CAPETOWN

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINS, PO, AO
SUBJ: ANGOLA INSURRECTION: THE PORTUGUESE VIEW

REF: (A) LISBON 4282, (B) STATE 123813

SUMMARY: THE MAY 27 LUANDA INSURRECTION WAS THE GREATEST
THREAT TO THE RPA SINCE INDEPENDENCE, ACCORDING TO THE
PORTUGUESE FOREIGN MINISTRY. ITS IMPACT COULD LEAD TO
SEVERE DIFFICULTIES FOR THE NETO REGIME OR EVEN A CUBAN
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PULL-OUT. ALL DEPENDS, HOWEVER, ON THE EXTENT OF
NITO ALVES'S INFLUENCE AND POPULARITY. CUBAN FORCES WERE
PROBABLY DEEPLY INVOLVED IN PUTTING DOWN THE COUP EFFORT.
EVENTS WILL IMPACT, IN A MANNER AS YET UNKNOWN, ON GROWING
REALIZATION EVEN PRIOR TO COUP EFFORT AMONG RPA OFFICIALS THAT
THE MILITARY, AGRICULTURAL, AND INDUSTRIAL SITUATIONS ARE
GROWING WORSE AND THAT THE CUBANS, CONTRARY TO EARLIER

EXPECTATIONS, DO NOT HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO PULL THE RPA THROUGH. END SUMMARY.

1. THE PORTUGUESE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S READING OF THE SITUATION IN LUANDA AS OF JUNE 7 FOLLOWS:

2. NITO ALVES: NITO ALVES WAS AT THE HEART OF THE CRISIS. HIS CONFRONTATION WITH NETO WAS FORESEEN BY THOSE WHO OBSERVED HIS RISING POWER AND INCREASING IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES WITH THE PRESIDENT. THE BASIS OF ALVES'S POPULARITY WAS HIS MILITANT BLACK RACISM, HIS BELIEF THAT THE RACIAL IMPURITY OF THE GOVERNMENT (I.E., ITS HIGH NUMBER OF WHITES AND MULATTOS) CORRUPTED GOVERNMENTAL EFFICIENCY AND IMPEDED MILITARY AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY. ALVES PROPAGATED THIS MESSAGE DEMOGOGICALLY. BY LATE MAY, HIS CHARISMA, HIS PAST PRESTIGE AS A WARRIOR, AND HIS EFFECTIVE MANIPULATION OF HIS INTERIOR MINISTRY HAD WON HIM A LARGE AND GROWING FOLLOWING AMONG SLUM DWELLERS, FAPLA, AND THE BUREAUCRACY.

3. MUCEQUES: ALVES IS PARTICULARLY POPULAR WITH THE 500,000 RESIDENTS OF THE PERIPHERAL SLUM BELT (MUCEQUES) SURROUNDING LUANDA. HE WON A FOLLOWING AS A RESULT OF HIS ORGANIZATION OF "POPULAR POWER" UNITS, MANY ARMED. HIS RACIST IDEAS TOOK ROOT WITH THE UNEDUCATED AND SUSCEPTIBLE POOR EAGER TO FIND A SCAPEGOAT FOR THEIR FALLING STANDARD OF LIVING. SOME, A GROWING NUMBER, CAME TO SEE THE MAINLY WHITE AND MULATTO CUBANS AS THEIR RACIAL OPPRESSORS: IN ONE RACIALLY INSPIRED IN-CONFIDENTIAL

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CIDENT THIS YEAR A NUMBER OF CUBAN SOLDIERS FRATERNIZING WITH BLACK WOMEN WERE MURDERED. HARSH CUBAN VENGEANCE FURTHER INFLAMED THE SITUATION. SOME RPA GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS SAW ALVES AS A PROPAGATOR OF ANTI-CUBAN, AS WELL AS RACIST, IDEAS.

4. DOWNFALL: NETO SAW THE ALVES THREAT AND MOVED TO BLOCK IT. FIRST, ALVES WAS DENIED A COVETED PROMOTION TO COMMANDER. LATER HE LOST THE MINISTRY AND WAS REMOVED FROM THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF MPLA. FINALLY, HE WAS THROWN INTO SAO PAULO PRISON ALONG WITH CONFEDERATE JOSE VAN DUNEN.

5. INSURRECTION: THE IMPRISONMENT OF ALVES AND VAN DUNEN DETONATED THE MAY 27 INSURRECTION. DETAILS ARE STILL SKETCHY, BUT IT SEEMED TO HAVE FOLLOWED THE CLASSIC COUP D'ETAT PATTERN: SEIZURE OF KEY POINTS AND ASSASSINATION OF GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS. FAPLA POLITICAL COMMISSAR BAKALOF (EDUARDO EVARISTA) AND FAPLA VICE CHIEF OF STAFF

MONSTRO IMORTAL (JACOB CAETANO) PROBABLY LED COUP EFFORT.
ENTIRE FAPLA UNITS, POSSIBLY UP TO COMPANY SIZE, SIDED WITH THE
INSURGENTS. PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES WERE:

(A) LUANDA RADIO -- THE STATION'S REMOTE LOCATION OUT-

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FOR EMBASSY CAPETOWN

SIDE LUANDA ENABLED THE PRO-ALVES FORCES TO APPROACH
UNOBSERVED. AFTER CAPTURE, REPEATED BROADCASTS
WERE ISSUED CALLING FOR POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE
INSURRECTION. SYMPATHIZERS WERE URGED TO TAKE THEIR
WEAPONS AND HEAD FOR THE REBEL OBJECTIVES, IN PARTICULAR
THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE.

(B) SAO PAULO PRISON -- ITS LOCATION ON THE OUTSKIRTS
OF LUANDA ALSO AIDED THE INSURGENTS IN MAINTAINING THE
ELEMENT OF SURPRISE. THERE WAS LITTLE RESISTANCE. ALVES
AND VAN DUNEN WERE LIBERATED AND ALL OTHER PRISONERS GIVEN
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THE CHANCE TO ESCAPE. ALL UNITA AND FNLA PRISONERS FLED. PORTUGUESE, MERCENARIES, AND "ACTIVE REVOLT" PRISONERS STAYED IN THEIR CELLS. HIGH DISA OFFICIAL HELDER NETO, WHO WAS WORKING IN THE PRISON, WAS SHOT.

(C) PRESIDENTIAL PALACE -- LOCATED IN CENTER CITY AND HEAVILY DEFENDED. THE GUARD WAS NOT CAUGHT NAPPING. IT WAS ALMOST OVERWHELMED, HOWEVER, BY THE WEIGHT OF ALVES FORCES, WHICH INCLUDED "HUNDREDS" OF ARMED, PRO-ALVES CIVILIANS WHO HAD RESPONDED TO RADIO LUANDA'S CALL TO REBELLION. THE ISSUE WAS IN DOUBT UNTIL THE ARRIVAL OF LOYALIST ARMORED CARS WHICH KILLED OR WOUNDED HUNDREDS OF REBELS.

6. DEFEAT: THERE ARE FEW DETAILS ON THE ACTUAL COURSE OF THE FIGHTING. THE EXTENT OF CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IS ALSO SHADOWY. HOWEVER IT IS CERTAIN THAT THE CUBANS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RECAPTURE OF RADIO LUANDA; CUBAN VOICES WERE OVERHEARD ON THE LIVE MICROPHONES AS THEY RETOOK THE STATION. THOUGH THERE IS NO PROOF, THERE IS "AN EXTREMELY HIGH PROBABILITY" THAT CUBANS COMMANDED AND DROVE THE ARMORED CARS THAT APPEARED AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE. CASUALTIES RESULTING FROM THE INSURRECTION COULD NUMBER "OVER A THOUSAND."

7. AFTERMATH: HUNDREDS OF INDIVIDUALS ALLEGED TO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE COUP HAVE BEEN ARRESTED. FAPLA UNITS (NO CUBANS) ARE COMBING THE SLUMS FOR ALVES AND HIS SYMPATHIZERS. GUNFIRE IS HEARD FREQUENTLY. SEVERAL PORTUGUESE RADICALS, MAINLY EX-MRPP, WERE IMPLICATED AND ARRESTED. PUNISHMENT FOR ALL IS LIKELY TO BE SEVERE.

8. NETO UP OR NETO DOWN?: IT IS TOO EARLY TO TELL WHETHER THE COUP STRENGTHENED OR WEAKENED THE NETO GOVERNMENT. THE EXTENT OF ALVES'S INFLUENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT, PROVINCES, MILITARY, AND AMONG THE PEOPLE IS NOT YET KNOWN. THE INSURRECTION'S IMPACT ON CUBAN THINKING IS NOT KNOWN. NETO COULD HAVE BEEN STRENGTHENED OR WEAKENED AS FOLLOWS:

(A) STRENGTHENED: IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT AS A RESULT
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OF EXTENSIVE PURGES, AND A POPULATION WHOSE SYMPATHY FOR ALVES WAS SHALLOW TO BEGIN WITH OR NOT TRANSLATED INTO ACTION, NETO WILL EMERGE WITH A STRENGTHENED HAND. THUS THE COUP ATTEMPT WILL BE LITTLE MORE THAN A QUICKLY FORGOTTEN INCIDENT.

(B) WEAKENED: NETO'S MPLA GOVERNMENT COULD HAVE BEEN IRREPARABLY DAMAGED GIVEN THE COMBINATION OF SOME FACTORS:
-- EXTENSIVE RESIDUAL SYMPATHY FOR ALVES, UNTOUCHED BY

PURGES;

-- ALVES, IN THE HILLS, LEADING A SIGNIFICANT OPPOSITION

MOVEMENT;

-- LOSS OF GOVERNMENTAL EFFECTIVENESS AND POPULAR

CONFIDENCE; AND

-- GROWING POPULAR RESENTMENT AGAINST CUBAN INTERVENTION,

PARTICULARLY AMONG SLUM DWELLERS, LEADING TO ARMED ATTACKS

AGAINST CUBAN SOLDIERS AND SUBSEQUENT CUBAN LOSS OF NERVE AND

WITHDRAWAL.

9. BACKGROUND FACTORS: TO THE GOP, THE MAY 27 INSURRECTION

PROVED THAT IT IS THE CUBANS THAT ARE HOLDING THE RPA

TOGETHER. THIS MIGHT BE EVIDENT TO RPA AS WELL, BUT PRIOR

TO MAY 27 IT WAS ALSO BECOMING EVIDENT TO RPA THE CURRENT

LEVEL OF SUPPORT BY CUBANS AND OTHERS WAS NOT SUFFICIENT.

SOME EXAMPLES:

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FOR EMBASSY CAPETOWN

(A) MILITARY: PRIOR TO THE COUP, THE NETO GOVERNMENT WAS AWAKENING TO THE GLOOMY MILITARY SITUATION. ITS PREVIOUS EXPECTATION, ALREADY SHATTERED, WAS THAT THE CUBANS WOULD READILY CLEAN UP UNITA, FNLA, AND FLEC. IT BECAME EVIDENT THAT THE CUBANS COULD NOT HANDLE IT. AND THE SITUATION WOULD GET WORSE: THE RPA EXPECTED RHODESIAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN SUPPORT FOR FNLA AND UNITA TO PICK UP. THE "CAN'T WIN" MENTALITY WAS GROWING.

(B) AGRICULTURAL: AGRICULTURE WAS IN SHAMBLES. COFFEE HAD NOT BEEN HARVESTED; LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION WAS ALMOST NIL.
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THE LARGE PERCENTAGE OF ALL FOOD WAS IMPORTED. RPA LEADERS WERE AWARE OF THE SMALL PROSPECT FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THIS SECTOR.

(C) INDUSTRY: ANOTHER DISILLUSION FOR NETO GOVERNMENT WAS AWARENESS THAT CUBAN TECHNICIANS WOULD NOT BE SUFFICIENT TO GET INDUSTRY ON TRACK. A CUBAN TECHNICIAN RECENTLY CONFIDED TO A PORTUGUESE DIPLOMAT IN LOBITO THAT PORTUGUESE TECHNICIANS WILL BE REQUIRED TO BRING SUGAR PRODUCTION TO AN ADEQUATE LEVEL.

(D) CABINDA: THE RPA WAS INCREASINGLY WORRIED BY THE NEW MODERATION OF THE CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE (C-B) GOVERNMENT AND ITS POSSIBLE DESIGNS ON CABINDA. THE RPA WAS HOPING TO REBUILD ITS TIES TO C-B BY DIPLOMATIC MEANS.
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Message Attributes

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